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AUTHOR Kemp, Paul F.
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ABSTRACT

Informal observations have convinced English teachers that students who read literature on a regular basis and with a critical eye make better writers and that students who experience the frustration incurred during the writing process tend to exhibit a healthier appreciation for the "craft" of literature. The movement to bring both literature and composition into a single frame of reference stems from these twin maxims and goes by several titles, from "Writing to Learn" to "Integrated Reading, Writing, and Thinking." Far from being a modern technique, however, this integrative approach comes from the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome, the world of philosophers indoctrinating pupils in the fine arts of civil disputation and rhetoric. This paper contends that by examining afresh the legacy of Aristotle and other rhetorical philosophers, today's practitioners/teachers of composition stand to recapture the particular rhetorical "moves" by which the ancients successfully integrated the "Language Arts." The paper argues that rhetorical analysis should occupy the center of any curriculum that seeks to integrate the processes of reading, writing, and critical thinking: rhetorical analysis is indeed a critical "bridge" between literature and composition. Through such analyses of the rhetorical situations which give rise to discourses, students come to appreciate the interests and expectations of their own target audiences. They learn that tone and "voice" must be modulated to suit the constraints of the discourse at hand. The paper considers in turn the three rhetorical appeals (or "pisteis") which comprise the sources of argument from which a speaker might draw: ethos, pathos, and logos. Contains 11 references. (NKA)

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Aristotle in the Classroom: A Rhetorical Bridge Between Literature and Composition.

by Paul F. Kemp

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Aristotle in the Classroom:
A Rhetorical Bridge Between Literature and Composition

Paul F. Kemp

"Literature and composition: together at last, and ne'er the twain shall part." Reading and writing enjoy a complex symbiotic relationship, as most teachers of English or the "Language Arts" will readily attest. Informal observations in our own classrooms have convinced us of these twin maxims: that students who read literature on a regular basis and with a critical eye make better writers; and that students who experience the pangs of frustration (as well as satisfaction) incurred during the writing process tend to exhibit a healthier appreciation for the "craft" of literature. The movement to bring both literature and composition into a single frame of reference stems from these twin maxims and goes by several modern titles, from "Writing to Learn" to "Integrated Reading, Writing and Thinking."

Far from being a modern technique, however, this integrative approach stems from the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome, the world of papyrus scrolls and "peripatetic" philosophers indoctrinating their pupils in the fine arts of civil disputation and rhetoric. Much like our own students on the cusp of a new millenium, students in the ancient world examined "literary" models of successful rhetoric and then composed their own texts, attempting to imitate the style and organizational patterns appropriate to the genre at hand. For the literate but still pervasively oral culture of the ancients, of course, the modes of discourse were often "listening" and "speaking" rather than "reading" and "writing." No matter: the techniques of rhetorical composition and analysis apply equally to spoken and written discourse.

We moderns have inherited from the ancients the technique of composing in imitation of established models (witness the dozens of anthologies of essays organized by "mode" that are available to any teacher of composition). Many other facets of the ancient rhetorical teachers' methods – facets that might significantly improve the success of our own teaching practice -- have fallen into disuse. It is my contention that, by examining afresh the legacy of Aristotle and other rhetorical philosophers, modern day practitioners and teachers of composition stand to recapture the particular rhetorical "moves" by which the ancients successfully integrated the "Language Arts." Aristotelian rhetorical analysis, far from being a relic of the ancient past, consigned to the dusty halls of obscure Alexandrine libraries, is worthy of revival as we approach the new millenium. It is my contention that rhetorical analysis should occupy the center of any curriculum that seeks to integrate the processes of reading, writing and critical thinking; rhetorical analysis is indeed a critical "bridge" between literature and composition.

The Rhetorical Situation

The ancients more than we, perhaps, recognized that all discourse is produced within the constraints of a particular social context (Crowley 3-6). We speak (and write) because of our disillusionment with a public policy, because we wish to sway our hearers (and readers) to share our disillusionment, because we have in mind an alternative that we wish to advance, because our words give us the power to bring that alternative into being. All discourse is born as a result of such social contingencies; all discourse is potentially "active" in that it seeks to bring about change, however small. Whenever we speak or write, we draw a reformist cloak about our shoulders; we seek to change the world.

For many of our students, however, speaking and writing have lost their "authenticity." Far from being "socially contingent," speaking and writing tasks have become the dispirited (and uninspiring) attempts to please the teacher and earn an "A." Why did Susie boot up her computer and compose her essay? Because it was assigned in class. Why did she choose this particular topic? Because she found it

on a list of "100 Essay Topics" that have "worked out well" for others. All sense of the persuasive context – the soil from which a discourse grows – has been lost. Susie has abandoned any sense of audience (other than her teacher) and any sense of purpose (other than fulfilling the assignment.)

The ancients knew that a discourse cannot be thus divorced from its social context. They knew that we speak and write only when there is an authentic need to do so -- an *exigence*. They knew that we speak and write only when there is a group of persons at hand who are amenable to persuasion and capable of bringing about the change we desire -- a *target audience*. They knew that we speak and write in order to shape the thoughts and behaviors of others -- a *purpose*. These three components – exigence, target audience, and purpose – comprise the Aristotelian "rhetorical situation." Our task as teachers is to build our students' appreciation for these components, thus rejuvenating their sense of socially contingent, purposeful composition.

"Writing with a purpose" is hardly an unfamiliar concept, of course; many of us have asked our students to specify their purposes for composition, but to limited effect. The missing ingredient, in many cases, is the *systematic analysis* and discussion of literary models, which then serve as springboards to our students' own compositions. In order for our students to grasp the true significance of their own "rhetorical situations," including their reasons for writing in the first place, they must practice identifying and analyzing the rhetorical situations of famous orators and authors who have, literally, changed the world. In my American Literature classes, for example, we begin the first semester with an investigation of texts from the era of exploration. Throughout this investigation, my students probe the Aristotelian categories of exigence, audience and purpose.

Our study of John Smith's famous missive, *A Description of New England*, for example, might yield the following Aristotelian lines of inquiry: What exigencies led John Smith, the founder of the Jamestown Colony, to publish this work in the Old World? (Fresh "recruits" were essential to replenish the Colony, as only 38 of the original 143 colonists had survived the first winter on this malaria-plagued peninsula.) To what target audiences did Smith aim his discourse? (Both rich and poor, free and indentured, were targeted in the text; for all these groups, the New World would offer endless opportunities for wealth.) What was Smith's purpose? (Smith sought to "sell" America to prospective immigrants, and he achieved this purpose handsomely: approximately 500 new settlers joined the Jamestown Colony between 1608 and 1609.) By analyzing Smith's "rhetorical situation," students develop an appreciation for the complex interactions between text and social context, between author and audience, between publication and purpose.

Analyses of authors' "rhetorical situations" often yield fascinatingly complex insights. Students will note that many texts are directed toward several target audiences and purposes simultaneously. Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence* provides a fine example of the "multiplicity" of discourses, as it is directed not only to the British crown (to assert a severance of all allegiance), but also to the able-bodied colonial populace (to recruit minutemen), to those Colonial governments whose equivocation might defeat the cause of independence (to encourage a final break with the Tories) and to the French aristocracy (to secure financial and military backing for the forces of revolution).

John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address* likewise embraces a multiplicity of audiences and purposes. He directs his message not only to his "fellow Americans" (to whom Kennedy offers a vision of cautious hope coupled with a call to patriotism), but also to the "old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share" (to whom he pledges unity), to the "new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free" (to whom he offers the warning that allegiance to the communist bloc might jeopardize their new-found freedom from colonialism), and to several others. Despite this multiplicity of audiences and purposes, Kennedy succeeds in establishing the singularly confident (and confidence-inspiring) "voice" needed to launch his Presidency.

Through such analyses of the rhetorical situations which give rise to discourses, students come to appreciate the interests and expectations of their own target audiences. They learn that tone and "voice" must be modulated in order to suit the constraints of the discourse at hand. Slang and profanity will do

little to advance the persuasive cause of a business letter, but they may in fact prove "persuasive" in the pool hall or at the barbecue. Such attention to tone and voice flow naturally from a conscious recognition of one's own exigencies, audiences and purposes.

Such literary analyses may also lead seamlessly to the production of student compositions. Following their analyses of Jonathan Edward's remarkable sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," my students are charged with the task of producing their own "sermons." Students define their own exigencies (whether serious "sins" or lighthearted pet peeves), as well as target audiences (the "sinners" or culprits whose behavior is to be called to judgement), and purposes (to cleanse this "stain" through repentance). With this limitless trove of rhetorical situations at their disposal, students compose "sermons" that range from serious examinations of the effects of divorce upon children to lighthearted spoofs of the impertinence of younger siblings.

The Rhetorical Appeals

A clearly articulated rhetorical situation is only the first step to a successful composition, however. My students' sermons would only loosely "follow" Edwards's model, were it not for their analysis of the second primary facet of the Aristotelian model: the rhetorical appeals. This facet of rhetorical analysis explores not the "what" but the "how" of successful rhetoric. Given particular exigencies, audiences and purposes, exactly how do authors manipulate their language in order to be persuasive? Aristotle addresses this question in his *Rhetoric*. According to Aristotle, three pisteis, or rhetorical appeals, comprise the sources of argument from which a speaker or writer might draw: *ethos*, the appeal to the author's credibility (how the author establishes his or her "authority" in the text); *pathos*, the appeal to the emotions (how the author "tugs our heartstrings"); and *logos*, the appeal to reason or logic (how the author's reasoned propositions advance his or her argument) (38-39). Each of these appeals is a key to unlock the methods of successful authors, and I will consider each in turn.

Ethos – the appeal to the author's credibility

The ancients knew well that discourses are likely to be viewed with a skeptical eye (and their authors' appeals rejected) unless the authors present themselves as responsible, knowledgeable figures whose discourses can be trusted. By providing our students with practice in analyzing authors' ethical appeals, we make them much more cognizant of how the messenger influences the message; we make them less susceptible to appeals that function solely on the basis of "celebrity appeal;" we make them appropriately wary of authors with no apparent credentials to back their assertions (a consideration that has grown especially important in the age of free "publication" on the Internet). An analysis of ethos encourages our students to ask evaluative questions: Has the author done his or her homework? Does the author possess the experience and the perspective necessary to write on this topic? Is he or she a trustworthy figure? Does he or she possess any ulterior motives that might have influenced the message?

An analysis of ethos goes beyond a consideration of "actual credibility" to a consideration of "perceived credibility." An example drawn from a very modern genre, the advertisement, will clarify this point: Michael Jordan may or may not possess detailed knowledge of the technical specifications of *Air Jordan* basketball shoes. He may or may not share the scientific understanding of the designers who measured sole width to a fraction of a centimeter, who tested protocols of padding material for moisture absorption and durability. Nonetheless, when Michael Jordan lends his name to the product, its credibility is enhanced manifold for a modern-day American target audience – an audience that honors, virtually worships, celebrity.

A form of extrinsic ethos, "celebrity appeal" sells not only *Air Jordans*, but also milk products, *American Express* cards and *Viagra*. When we encourage our students to recognize this form of ethos for what it truly is – an extrinsic, irrelevant factor when judging the quality of an appeal – we have

empowered them, not only as consumers of retail products, but also as consumers of discourse. After all, perceived credibility is as essential to authors as it is to retail marketers, and authors are seldom shy when it comes to manipulating this appeal.

Christopher Columbus, for example, strives to construct a compassionate and generous public persona in his *Journal of First Voyage to America*. He offers the following details regarding his initial encounters with the Arawak people: "I forbade my men to purchase any thing of them with such worthless articles as bits of earthenware, fragments of platters, broken glass, nails, and thongs of leather. I ordered that nothing which they had left should be taken, not even the value of a pin" (211). This passage offers a glimpse of what Aristotle would term "artistic" ethos -- that is, an appeal to credibility internal to the text, a product of the author's own posturing hand.

Regrettably, such artistic ethos comes with no more guarantee of reliability than its "celebrity" cousin. As some historians have remarked, Columbus's compassion and generosity, no matter how conspicuously present in his *Journal*, prove elusive in fact. In 1495, Columbus enslaved some fifteen hundred of the Arawak people; and in Haiti, more than half of the 250,000 indigenous peoples who had the misfortune of encountering Columbus's men perished "through murder, mutilation, or suicide" within two short years (Zinn 4). Through the analysis of ethos, students learn to consult both textual and non-textual materials, weighing the author's constructed persona against evidence from the historical or contemporary record; they learn to examine with a critical eye each new reference source they consult, whether in print or in electronic media. The analysis of ethos brings a healthy skepticism to students' inquiries in both literary and non-literary domains.

Pathos – the appeal to the emotions

Students (and teachers) who relish the appearance of each new Stephen King novel know well the appeal of pathos in a composition. Discourses that prove compelling on a visceral level, discourses that inflame the "passions" of an audience, often succeed in achieving their authors' purposes.

Pathos is a common appeal in the world of advertising. Consider a typical television commercial for a local auto dealer: when each customer is portrayed emerging from the lot with a smile animating his or her features, it is clear that more than Hondas are for sale; happiness itself is being dispensed for the cost of a down payment and an option to purchase. And happiness sells Hondas far more efficiently than "air drag factors" or wheel rotation specs.

Although appealing to the emotions may strike some modern readers as an unseemly, somehow unclean persuasive tactic, many literary giants have found this appeal irresistible. Dickens's portrayal of a shivering, hungry Oliver Twist has sent many readers in quest of social reform. Margaret Atwood's portrayal of a futuristic patriarchal state in *The Handmaid's Tale* has opened readers' eyes to the issue of gender discrimination. And John Steinbeck's anger regarding the plight of migrants seethes from many passages in *The Grapes of Wrath*. As Steinbeck himself admits in a letter regarding this novel, "I've done my damndest [sic] to rip a reader's nerves to rags" (qtd. in Railton 32). We respond to Steinbeck's "kick in the teeth" with all due anger; the rhetorical bomb has been delivered, with pathos as its vehicle.

Appeals to pathos are often the products of creative diction and imagery. President Roosevelt's Address to Congress upon the bombing of Pearl Harbor inflamed the passions through calculated word choices: he decried the "infamy" and "treachery" of the Japanese attack, condemning it as "unpremeditated," "unprovoked" and "dastardly." These words evoked righteous anger from many listeners who shared Roosevelt's horror at the "onslaught" of war (621-622).

In literary contexts, few appeals to pathos are as compelling as Marc Anthony's as he stands before his "Friends, Romans, [and] Countrymen" (III. ii. 74) and attempts to inflame the crowd's passions against the assassins of Julius Caesar:

> If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. . . .
> Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
> See what a rent the envious Casca made;
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed,
> And as he plucked his cursed steel away,
> Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it. . . .
> This was the most unkindest cut of all. . . .
> O, now you weep, and I perceive you feel
> The dint of pity; these are gracious drops. . . . (III. ii. 170-195)

Not one of the Romans there assembled would judge this appeal to pathos an inappropriate response to Caesar's murder. And yet it is indeed manipulative. Despite the supreme irony of Antony's denial -- "For I have neither writ, nor words, nor worth, / Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech / To stir men's blood" (III. ii. 222-223) -- this appeal to pathos cannot fail to achieve Antony's purpose: "Now let it work: Mischief, thou art afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt" (III. ii. 261-262). Indeed, the appeal of pathos is such that dynasties are built and destroyed through its power.

Logos -- the appeal to reason

No matter how effectively authors establish their credibility, no matter how effectively they manipulate our emotions, their works are bound to remain unpersuasive unless their logical claims and proofs rise to the level of their audiences' expectations. Logos -- the third and perhaps most central rhetorical appeal examined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* -- consists of both inductive argumentation (through patterns of examples) and deductive argumentation (on the basis of commonly accepted premises). Students who have mastered both species of logos are able to test their compositions for truth-value, validity, and thoroughness of proof. As with the other facets of the Aristotelian method, students learn this appeal most efficiently through the intensive analysis of literary models.

When my students examine the *Declaration of Independence*, for example, they discover that one of Jefferson's central claims (that the British monarch is a tyrant) is developed through an extensive pattern of examples, a *paradigm*. In Jefferson's own words, "The history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world" (134). A staggering litany of examples ensues, comprising the bulk of the *Declaration*. From the king's insistence upon keeping a standing army in times of peace, to his quartering of soldiers in the colonists' private dwellings, each of the king's "injuries and usurpations" is catalogued in vivid imagery and cumulative parallel structures. Having thus demonstrated the king's "tyranny," Jefferson carries his argument to its next logical step: "A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people" (136).

This claim, that a tyrant cannot rule free citizens, is a prime example of the second kind of argumentation open to a writer or speaker: the deductive enthymeme. An enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism, some of the premises of which may be assumed rather than expressed. Jefferson's claim is based upon the following formal syllogism:

Major Premise:	"A tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people."
Minor Premise:	The current king of Great Britain is a tyrant (*cf.* examples).
Conclusion:	Therefore, the king is unfit to rule the free people of these States.

If Jefferson's readers admit the truth of his premises, then his logical conclusion becomes inescapable.

Unlike the inductive paradigm examined above, this enthymeme is based not upon empirical data (examples), but upon a commonly accepted premise: that tyrants should not rule free citizens. The enthymeme is a matter of public faith, and need not be objectively verifiable. As Aristotle recognized, "false" premises can be quite persuasive in the hands of a charismatic speaker or writer who advocates dogmatic, unexamined claims that an audience is willing to "assume" without empirical support. This, then, is the danger of reasoning through enthymemes: that the logical deduction may be perfectly valid although the premises are false. Through a study of Aristotelian logic, fallacies of reasoning, and simple syllogistic arguments, our students are better equipped to reject arguments that are unverifiable or dogmatic.

Historical and literary examples of such "unverifiable" enthymemes abound. Consider for example, the Shakespearean soliloquy in which Brutus weighs the necessity of assassinating his compatriot, Julius Caesar:

> It must be by his death; and for my part,
> I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
> But for the general. He would be crowned.
> How that might change his nature, there's the question.
> It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
> And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
> And then I grant we put a sting in him
> That at his will he may do danger with.
> Th' abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
> Remorse from power; And to speak truth of Caesar,
> I have not known when his affections swayed
> More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
> That lowliness is young ambition's ladder;
> Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
> But when he once attains the upmost round,
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
> By which he did ascend. So Caesar may;
> Then lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
> Will bear no color for the thing he is,
> Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
> Would run to these and these extremities;
> And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
> Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
> And kill him in the shell (II. i. 21-34).

It is notable that Brutus argues with enthymemes, not examples. He is unwilling or perhaps unable to develop a paradigm that would convict Caesar on the basis of his past or present actions. As Brutus concedes three times in the space of this short soliloquy, "(1) I know no personal cause to spurn at him, / But for the general. He would be crowned. . . . (2) And to speak truth of Caesar, / I have not known when his affections swayed / More than his reason. . . . (3) And since the quarrel / Will bear no color for the thing he is, / Fashion it thus. . . ." (numerals added).

Indeed, Brutus must "fashion" an argument (using enthymemes) in order to convict Caesar. "*The thing he is*" being unobjectionable, what Caesar *may become* provides the sole justification for killing him. Brutus's speech represents a rationale for murder based upon predictions of future events (one of the four Aristotelian "topoi," or sources of major premises). If Caesar's current trajectory continues unabated, Brutus argues, then in the future "what he is, augmented" would prove "dangerous" as the adder's sting.

Students might assemble in small groups to identify the enthymemes by which Brutus convicts his friend. Among the enthymemes students might posit are the following:

I.	*Major Premise:*	He who climbs to the "upmost round" of the social ladder turns his back on those beneath him.
	Minor Premise:	Caesar is such a "climber-upward."
	Conclusion:	Caesar will turn his back on those beneath him.
II.	*Major Premise:*	Crowning a man renders him liable to "the abuse of power."
	Minor Premise:	Caesar "would be crowned."
	Conclusion:	Caesar will be liable to "the abuse of power."
III.	*Major Premise:*	"Serpents" must be killed in the shell before they hatch.
	Minor Premise:	Caesar is a "serpent" and his crowning is "hatching."
	Conclusion:	Caesar must be killed before he is crowned.

Students who are capable of identifying and evaluating an author's paradigms and enthymemes possess a power beyond value: the power to recognize and resist the invalid, the untrue, the specious, the fallacious, the disingenuous -- as well as the power to sift through the complexities of argument and extract their essential truths.

The Rhetorical Appeals in Tandem

The Aristotelian appeals to ethos, pathos and logos are an author's triple punch combination; when applied in tandem, their cumulative effect may sway even the most resistant reader. Nor are the three rhetorical appeals the tools of authors alone. Characters within literary works regularly deploy these appeals to "move" the sympathies of their fellow characters. Young Dave, the title character in Richard Wright's classic story, "The Man Who Was Almost A Man," uses an effective combination of ethos, pathos and logos appeals to convince his mother to allow him to buy a gun. Dave opens with an ethos appeal: "Ah done worked hard alla summer n ain ast yuh fer nothin." He then invokes his mother's fear of danger: "Pa ain got no gun. We needa gun in the house. Yuh kin never tell whut might happen." Finally, Dave presents his logos appeal: "Ahm almos a man now. Ah wants a gun" (1698). This last appeal is a syllogistic argument, with an assumed major premise: grown men want (and should possess) guns. With his mother's grudging consent, Dave's rhetorical purpose is fulfilled.

Aristotle in the Classroom

Students who are capable of analyzing the success of arguments such as young Dave's, employing the simple and elegant Aristotelian model of ethos, pathos, and logos, soon graduate from their roles as readers to new roles as speakers and writers. That same Aristotelian model serves them well when they plan and draft their own arguments. They take care to establish credible, authoritative voices. They anticipate and strive to shape their audiences' emotional responses. And they construct texts that skillfully blend *a priori* premises with verifiable claims that are systematically developed through examples.

The Aristotelian method of rhetorical analysis is clearly far more than a tool to analyze and evaluate others' arguments. It provides our students with the critical vocabulary necessary to transfer skills from the domain of literary analysis to the domain of composition. It encourages students to clarify

their *own* arguments, to systematize their development, and to judge their worth. It puts "critical thinking" back in the center of students' composing processes. Truly, the Aristotelian method encourages integrated reading and writing experiences on the basis of a thoroughgoing critical analysis.

The Aristotelian method empowers, not least because it encourages our students to grapple with the fundamental questions that persist through the generations: Why (and how) do we speak or listen? Why (and how) do we read or write? These questions will never cease to fascinate us, even centuries hence. And so, as we enter the new millennium, with our gazes fixed upon the future, let us not forget the debt we owe to the ancients. It may be that, one hundred years hence, as a future generation of English teachers prepares to enter the twenty-second century, it will find much to learn (and much to teach) in the life's work of a peripatetic philosopher from Athens.

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The author may be contacted at the following electronic mail addresses: pfkemp@hotmail.com
paulfkemp@home.com